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Organizers of 2 Hamilton events protesting COVID-19 restrictions face charges: police

By **Don Mitchell** • Global News

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Anti-masking advocates rallied at Hamilton's Gore Park on Sunday July 20, 2020. The advocacy group says mandatory masking infringes on people's rights. **Lisa Polewski / Global News**



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The organizers of two large weekend rallies protesting the province's current [COVID-19](#) regulations that restrict gatherings and have kept non-essential businesses closed are facing charges, according to Hamilton police.

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The first of the two demonstrations drew over 400 people to an area near the Centre on Barton at Kenilworth Avenue North and Barton Street East.

Most who attended the event didn't wear face masks and did not adhere to current social distancing orders, according to investigators.

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Meanwhile, the '[Hugs Over Masks](#)' event Sunday near city hall on Bay Street South and Main Street drew just under 50 people.

Hamilton police say the get-togethers exceeded the number permitted for an outdoor gathering and 20 charges were laid in all.

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Individuals found in contravention of the provincial Emergency Measures and Civil Protection Act (EMCPA) and Reopening Ontario Act (ROA) face fines of between \$770 and a \$1,000.

Hamilton police Deputy Chief Ryan Diodati told councillors on Monday that the city worked with bylaw officers on the weekend to single out those responsible for the episodes and issued tickets.

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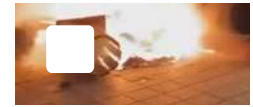




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“We take it very seriously when people are blatantly disregarding a public health crisis that affects everyone,” said Diodati.

Emergency operations centre director Paul Johnson echoed Diodati’s sentiments after revealing enforcement also had to deal with an outdoor birthday party of 10 people in addition to an indoor wedding and a baby shower on the weekend.

The city’s medical officer of health weighed in on the gatherings during the city’s pandemic update on Monday afternoon stressing that actions will not help the community currently plagued with rising COVID-19 cases and virus-related hospitalizations.

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Dr. Elizabeth Richardson says the peak of the current wave three crisis will likely hit sometime in late April or early May and characterized the city’s current predicament as “challenging.”

“I just can’t underscore enough just how serious a situation we are in,” said Richardson.

READ MORE: [‘Hugs Over Masks’ protesters charged after Sunday demonstration at Hamilton city hall](#)

“We’re seeing it in the number of cases we have, we’re seeing it in the age groups that are being affected.”

Hamilton police have laid multiple charges in several Hugs Over Masks events, which have been a regular occurrence in Hamilton on Sundays since July 2020.

The group claims the protests are in support of “restoring our liberties” in Ontario and that current COVID-19 measures are “unnecessarily harming Ontarians’ health and rights.”

Police say the latest rally had a bump in participants after gatherings in recent weeks had been getting smaller. Investigators said one rally on Feb. 7 appeared to draw fewer than five people.

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